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The programme has credibility... It gives you a framework to make change in a structured way

Why did you apply for the NHS Flex For The Future?

We were already developing our staff retention strategy and looking at how we could improve staff experience and work life balance for our colleagues. We were exploring how we could use flexible working to support this when the opportunity to join the programme came along, which was fantastic.

How did you form your change team?

We knew that flexible working could be more of a challenge in clinical areas, so we wanted to make sure we had a multi-disciplinary team in place to explore this. Our change team was made up of representatives from the medical, nursing, midwifery and Allied Health Professionals workforce, as well as from our trade unions. We also engaged with other teams such as e-rostering, communications and ESR (Electronic Staff Records) as and when needed.

Were there many different perspectives in the group?

We had a good range of perspectives. The nursing and midwifery representatives were able to contribute perspectives on how flexible working could work practically in their areas. HR and our trade union colleagues brought experience of handling flexible working situations across the organisation. Our medical representative initially felt that flexible working could be a challenge for the medical profession but, as we worked through the programme, she started to reflect and said, 'Actually, I think we do work more flexibly than we realise,' which was interesting.

How did you keep everyone engaged?

We had a meeting after each workshop because that was the best time to get everybody together and we'd go over the main points and discuss what we needed to do. The agendas were really handy for planning what we wanted to talk about.

What did you find useful about the programme?

I really enjoyed the programme; I liked the way it was structured and how practical it was. The workshops were brilliant, they had great passion and energy. The speakers were good too, really useful. The tools we were given were so helpful because it saved us valuable time to be able to say, 'Look, here's an action plan template or a change template we can use straight away.' The flexible job design guidance was particularly useful. It all came together to make my job so much easier than it would have been had I been starting from scratch by myself.

What was the biggest shift you noticed?

From my perspective, I began to feel more confident in articulating why flexible working was important for us. I could draw on the models, research and evidence that were shared with us and articulate the ideas more effectively than I would have been able to otherwise. In terms of the change team, it was good for them to hear about flexible working from an outside source and learn about the bigger picture. In HR, we can take this stuff for granted so it's good to see the ideas spreading in other areas.



What has the programme changed?

The action plan we're drafting is much more evidence-based and structured around key enablers than it would have been otherwise. We wouldn't have built up the level of baseline information and data collection needed to really analyse what's going on in the organisation. And we wouldn't have had the focus groups. Our action plan is better informed by evidence and stakeholder feedback now.

What have you achieved so far?

We've been conducting our focus groups with both staff and managers to hear how they think we can embed culture change around flexible working and build on what works well already. We've used the Timewise Flexibility Maturity Curve to frame these conversations which has been really interesting. We've also made some practical changes. We've added a flexible working document and statements around how we support flexible working to our recruitment page. We've also included it in our induction checklist so managers can talk to people about flexibility as soon as they start with us. We're adding a module on flexible working to our leadership development framework and we've introduced flexible working applications on ESR as well. The flexible working toolkits for individuals and managers available through the programme were brilliant and we've implemented them in our organisation.

What steps are you taking in your action plan?

We really want people to understand what we mean by flexible working so some of our key points are around socialising the NHS definition of flexible working. We're looking at how we establish a set of workforce metrics, so that we can better monitor and report on flexible working within the organisation. We're also working with our trade unions to develop a new flexible working policy, bringing in the learning from this programme. We want managers to feel confident about having open conversations with their teams about flexible working so our action plan includes ways to

develop training, guidance and support to help with this. We'll also be looking at how flexibility can be better discussed in the recruitment process.

What's next?

We'll be taking the case for change to the board and socialising it more widely with leaders and line managers as well as spending time helping people understand why it's important. Then it's about getting our new policy up and running so we're clear on what we want to do as an organisation.

What challenges have you faced?

Time pressures have been an issue, especially with the impact of Covid. We've also had a few changes to the membership of our change team, but we've managed to get other people onboard and keep the team going.

How would you improve the programme?

At the beginning of the course I think everyone should be encouraged to evaluate what success will look like for them. That way, you can build that goal into your action plan and clearly assess your progress at the end. Often success isn't a linear process, especially when it comes to culture change, so you need to have a realistic way to measure your success.

What advice would you give to any other organisations considering the programme?

Make sure your change team is fully engaged early on and understands that the hard work starts when the programme ends, that's when you need to kick it up a gear. You're not a change team if you just do the planning and stop there, this is about the long term.

Would you recommend NHS Flex For The Future to others?

Definitely. It's a good programme, really valuable. It gives you a framework to make change in a structured way. The programme has credibility and I feel that people are listening more to the ideas because of that.

